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Jury service fundamental to American democracy

Editor,

The right to trial by jury is central to our democracy; indeed, it was the colonists' loss of that right that helped spark the Revolutionary War. The right to trial by jury is enshrined in both the United States and Michigan constitutions. However, jury service is often viewed, not as a high duty of citizenship, but merely as an inconvenience. Regrettably, some of us, when we receive the summons to jury duty in the mail have but one thought: "How can I get out of it?"

Jury service involves a sacrifice of time, convenience and sometimes money. Nonetheless, it is also essential to our system of justice that citizens answer the call to jury service.

Serving on a jury does make a difference to your community. Jurors decide the difference between criminal guilt and innocence and between civil liability and nonliability. The decisions those jurors make affect thousands of lives every day and those decisions have a direct impact upon the quality of life for each and every one of us.

The jury system is also uniquely democratic. The founders of our country knew, based on their experience and the lessons of history, that the right to trial by jury was a safeguard against tyranny and oppression. Through the jury, citizens balance the power of the state with the power of the community. There are few civic activities which provide such direct involvement in democracy.

To celebrate the jury's place in our democracy, and honor all those who answer the call to jury service, the Michigan Supreme Court has proclaimed this month to be Juror Appreciation Month in Michigan. This month, we acknowledge and celebrate the vital role that juries play in our justice system.

The judges of the Berrien County Trial Court join the Michigan Supreme Court in celebrating the duty and privilege of jury service. On behalf of the Berrien County judges, I urge you to join us in honoring - and when called, participating in - one of the cornerstones of American democracy.

Paul Maloney

Chief judge

Berrien County Trial Court

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